

Soviet U-2

As we might have suspected, the Russians had a U-2 before we developed our own.

The Russian plane pictured below is officially designated U-2. It was photographed in 1944 by me when I was a member of the U.S. Army Air Force stationed at the American shuttle-bombing base in Poltava (Ukraine).

The Soviet U-2 was designed originally by N. N. Polikarpov as an observation plane (like our own U-2). During the War (Second, not First), it was used, for observing behind enemy lines, as a training plane, for air-ambulance work, and also carried light bombs slung on jacks under its lower wings.

The Soviet U-2 is described in Jane's All the Worlds Aircraft (1945 edition) as a single-engine, biplane with a maximum speed of 150 kilometers per hour (93 mph.) and a maximum ceiling of about 10,000 ft.

While the Russians despise our U-2, they speak very warmly of their own:

"This September night was cold and dark in Stalingrad. Everything had grown confused in these two weeks during which fighting had been going on in the city itself. The front shifted so fantastically from block to block, and from building to building, that the Germans were afraid to bomb at night for fear of hitting their own men. Only our little U-2 'Jewelers,' as they were called, could be ordered to destroy the left wing of a building while our own soldiers were occupying its right wing. They did their jeweler's work at night, and it was a local joke to say that they could stand at anchor all night long over the Germans and drop their little bombs one by one." (From Konstantin Simonov, Days and Nights, p. 68.)

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